

The Forty-First Session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights finished its work in Geneva two weeks ago today. This was the first session in ten years at which Canada was not present as a full voting member. We were, however, represented by a very active Observer delegation, that was able to accomplish a great deal by its own efforts, and in collaboration with many member delegations.

While the Forty-First Session was not marked by any outstanding advances, it led to the consolidation of existing mechanisms and initiatives, and to a few new proposals. Reports were presented for the first time on the situations in Iran and Afghanistan, and it was decided that interim reports on these countries would be made to the General Assembly, in line with the procedure followed for Guatemala, El Salvador and Chile. The resolutions on El Salvador and Guatemala were significantly improved, and both were adopted without a negative vote.

The Commission's working group on the draft convention on the Rights of the Child made good progress, reaching agreement on five further articles in that document. This continues to be a matter of great interest to Canada, and our delegation contributed fully to this progress. It was, however, regrettable that the working group on the Declaration on the Rights of Minorities once again failed to come to grips with their task because of the lack of an agreed definition of what constitutes a minority. In his speech to the recent conference in Quebec on the Rights of Minorities, the Secretary of State for External Affairs indicated that Canada would support efforts in this important, but rather neglected field. It is a subject in which Canada has considerable experience, and a continuing interest. The work on a definition is now in the capable hands of Judge Jules Deschênes, and the other members of the Subcommittee will have the benefit of his research and consideration before them at their August meeting. So there is some progress. Once this watershed is passed, we hope for more rapid progress towards some general standards on the rights of distinct communities which may exist within national borders.

At this session of the Commission, Canada cosponsored no fewer than 12 resolutions, compared to 13 at the previous session, when we were full members. These included resolutions on Cambodia, Guatemala, Iran, Afghanistan, Mass Exoduses of people due to human rights violations, disappearances, freedom of expression, prisoners